Introduction:
The Fort Peck Tribes Project Assist program has gone through some changes this past year but has continued to provide positive employment opportunities and other employment assistance to the residences of the reservation who are within our geographic service area. Our Program Plan seeks to “mitigate joblessness and reduce poverty rates throughout our Indian communities...” The program continues to administratively operate and integrate both Adult and Youth components of the DOL’s Workforce Investment Opportunity Act, Section 166 grant; the Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance program; and the DHHS Child Care Program grant into our “Project Assist” plan, for program year 2017.

The Reservation:
The Fort Peck Indian Reservation sits in the upper northeast quarter of Montana in one of the most isolated and rural regions in the state. The location impacts the economy of the reservation and the evidence can be found in the most common economic indicators such as the unemployment rate which according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau report (every 10 years) is 49%. The most recent Bureau of Indian Affairs report also calculates an unemployment rate which is higher at 53.50%. With a Native American population of 7,260 living on the reservation perhaps greatest challenge is to build a highly skilled and trained Native American workforce that promotes job readiness, global competitiveness, and self-sufficiency. We will seek to meet that challenge.

The Reservation Economy:
The reservation economy has been characterized in previous narratives and other reservation reports as undeveloped and dependent upon federally subsidized transfer payments. Agriculture or farming & ranching are the chief economic activities in the region followed by
natural resource development which is entirely export driven. The Fort Peck Tribes have engaged in various business endeavors and created manufacturing related corporations such as Fort Peck Tech Services, Inc., and West Electronics, both of which continue to provide employment opportunities for our Project Assist Adult participants. An agriculturally related off reservation business called “Sidney Sugars” (in Sidney, MT.) continues to provide seasonal employment for tribal members. The Project Assist program through its Supportive Service component has provided work clothing and boots to (20) participants who were hired at the sugar plant. As of today, the Fort Peck Tribes Transportation system provides daily bus service to Sidney, MT., for tribal members and Native Americans who are employed at the plant.

The Positives:

General Assistance

The Fort Peck Tribes Project Assist plan incorporates the General Assistance program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for program year 2017 and was successful in transitioning from BIA management to Tribal management through the 477 program. With the GA program fully integrated into the Project Assist as an additional service, this year we have served 179 participants with 18 going into employment and 3 clients obtaining a degree. The Project Assist staff also helped participants get approval for SSDI and we continue to assist our clients with obtaining a Driver’s License and GED/Hi-Set certificate.

Adult & Youth Services

For the Adult services the program had a total of 79 participants with 73 Terminee’s while carrying over 6 current participants. 41 were Females and 38 were males. Of the total participants, 38 already had a high school diploma or GED. The state of Montana has recently changed the GED program to the Hi-Set program and the local community college offers classroom training for all participants. For 2017 there were no participants who were seeking an Educational or Training objective. Finally, of the 79 Adult participants 4 entered unsubsidized employment which is down from the previous year. For Youth services we can demonstrate a growing need because of the number of youth we turned away due to the lack of funds in the previous year. However, in 2017 the 477 program experienced some carryover
from previous years and we were able to provide more funds for the reservation Youth portion of the grant. As noted in previous years, this is a trend we will continue to see because the reservation population is growing younger as the “baby boom” generation (those born 1946-1964) continues to age. As a consequence, the median age is also sliding to the younger side of the scale. In the coming years this trend represents a major challenge as millennials (those born 1982-2000) enter the work force and those born after 2000 reach the qualifying age for our youth program. We have determined that this will be a trend we will continue to see in the coming years.

Our Project Assist Youth Services component continues to generate interest as we had 115 total participants during the June to August period. Of that number 56 were male and 59 were female. 87 were students with 15 already possessing a HS Diploma/GED while 12 were drop outs. Our Project Assist program works with students who would like to receive their GED/Hi-Set certification. The Youth component is critical as we seek to teach valuable employment skills and prepare them for success while at the same time building self-esteem and confidence.

**Childcare Services**

The Project Assist Child Care component continues to operate successfully with a total of 79 families receiving assistance with 98 children receiving child care with parents who are working or in training/educational programs. In terms of types of care received, 63 children receive Center based care while 35 receive care in the home. The Child Care program also spent about $1288.09 “Quality dollars” (down from previous years) to improve Child Care services to Child Care facilities, Group Homes, and Family/Relative care; which includes funds to repair facilities, Child care supplies such as cribs, games, educational games, toys and other Child Care items. The program also provides certified training for providers and interested parents for CPR, Food Handlers, Blood Bourne Pathogens, etc. Please see the financial and statistical reports for a brief breakdown of the child care component. The Fort Peck Tribes do not operate a Child Care facility and Native American children receiving Center based care are in facilities that are all privately owned and licensed.

**Program Changes and Development**
A new director (Garrett Big Leggins) was hired and started on March 2016. Another change was the consolidation of the Project Assist program, Child Care program and General Assistance/Tribal NEW programs into one office location in an effort to more closely provide a “one-stop shop” for our clients seeking “Project Assist” services. The 477 staff is also working on finding a new building and location to move into since we are anticipating an expansion of the program. The finances/budget of the programs administered under the Project Assist umbrella are being integrated into one budget through the Fort Peck Tribes Centralized Accounting system and local financial institution. The staff is also working to implement the program recommendations stemming from the April 2017 site visit and program review made by Mr. Kenneth LeMieux.

**The Negatives:**

A reservation economy that is dependent and depressed is the primary barrier to success for our clients. It creates the high unemployment rates we experience today due to the lack of jobs and economic opportunity. The largest employers on the reservation continue to be Governments or government related programs, the local BIA agency, Indian Health Service clinics, the Fort Peck Community College, local hospitals, and local K-12 school districts. This scenario creates a situation where the concentration of employment opportunities is in the public sector of the economy. However, there are many private smaller businesses on the reservation (Indian and non-Indian) and the Project Assist program works with a number of them to provide valuable employment experience for our clients. This year we worked with 5 local businesses in providing employment related services through worksite agreements or supportive services through our clients despite the economic condition of the area.

As noted earlier another barrier is the lack of adequate funding for our youth component which we hope will be addressed in the future. Another barrier of note is that many of our participants do not possess a High School diploma or GED (Hi-Set) and/or a valid Drivers License. Our program works with participants to obtain these important documents however some participants who are older have trouble passing the Hi-Set program particularly the math
portion of the test. And finally, rampant substance abuse is the reason why many clients have failed to achieve economic self-sufficiency. To address the substance abuse issue the 477 program makes regular referrals (25 of the 47 this year) to the Spotted Bull Treatment program for alcohol and drug evaluations. We ask clients to comply with their treatment program as a requirement for 477 services.

**Summary:**

The Fort Peck Tribes P.L. 102-477 Project Assist program is continuing to provide valuable employment assistance for Native Americans within our service area. Recent internal changes such as the integration of program components and program revenue should serve to strengthen the administration of the program and offer a more fully integrated plan of action for our participants as well as seek to operate the Project Assist program as it was intended by Federal legislation. The Project Assist program is also working with our Chief Financial Officer and Contracts & Grants Specialist to implement the recommendations of the our AOTR Mr. Kenneth LeMieux.